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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E AND IO/PSC (KAMBATTA AND CROWE)

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [UNSC](#) [KPKO](#) [ER](#) [ET](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: UNMEE: FRANCE AGREES WITH U.S. BUT CAN'T IDENTIFY
LEVERAGE

REF: STATE 21218

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, 1.4 (b/d
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1. (C) SUMMARY: The French agree with U.S. views on UNMEE (reftel), MFA Eritrea/Ethiopia desk officer Thierry Caboche told us on March 4. He said, however, that finding useful leverage to use against Eritrea to encourage cooperative behavior was difficult, given Eritrea's self-imposed isolation and its tendency to react negatively to anything smacking of criticism. He offered no concrete suggestions. Caboche hoped that the international community could at least preserve some element of UNMEE, noting that once UNMEE left and shut down completely, it would be difficult to put in place a successor operation. He also noted the unfortunate precedent that would be established should Eritrea succeed in forcing this UN operation to cease operation. Caboche said that France welcomed further consultation with like-minded partners to chart a way forward. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) MFA Eritrea/Ethiopia desk officer Thierry Caboche responded to reftel demarche on March 4. He said that France shared the U.S. views of UNMEE and Eritrea's destructive behavior. The problem, he said, was to identify effective measures the UN and international community could take to change Eritrean behavior. Describing Eritrea as an "irrational and paranoid" state similar in some ways to North Korea, Caboche remarked on Eritrea's self-imposed isolation and its view that everyone was against it. While the international community needed to take some form of action against Eritrea over UNMEE, Caboche said that the GOF was concerned about two things -- (1) finding appropriate measures to take and (2) whether any action would likely influence Eritrea's behavior for the better.

3. (C) Elaborating, Caboche said that the international community lacked easily identifiable leverage over Eritrea, which had already retreated into itself and seemed indifferent to outsiders' views. He said that Eritrea was not like Kenya, a "normal, rational" state capable of assessing its interests, responding to international pressure, and deciding on a course of action that would further its interests and at the same time ease international pressure. The recent political compromise in Kenya was an example of Kenya's rational approach to its problems and pressure exerted on Kenya by the rest of the world. In contrast, Eritrea had few comparable links with the outside world, either political or economic, that could be exploited by the international community to coerce or encourage better behavior.

4. (C) Caboche acknowledged that while France shared the

U.S. view that something should be done to change Eritrea's behavior, the GOF had, for the moment, no concrete suggestions. He indicated France's willingness to discuss possibilities with the U.S. and other concerned countries.

15. (C) On the second point (the effect any action would have on Eritrea), Caboche said that even if the international community decided on specific steps, it was not certain that Eritrea would respond, given its paranoia and its willingness to operate in isolation. Strong measures could provoke equally strong defiance or even Eritrean pride in standing up to the international community.

16. (C) As to why Eritrea was lashing out at UNMEE, Caboche said that this too reflected its paranoia and tendency to view the world through its own lens. In Eritrea's view, one of UNMEE's functions was to help implement the conclusions of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC). The EEBC's eventual ruling seemed to favor Eritrea (which caused Ethiopia to reject the ruling). Because the EEBC decision was never implemented, the Eritreans believed that UNMEE had failed to accomplish what Eritrea considered its primary mission and therefore was no longer necessary. Caboche said that this was a completely unreasonable and narrow way of viewing the situation but that interpreting events unreasonably and narrowly was typical of Eritrean behavior. He commented that Eritrea failed to appreciate, and had now completely destroyed the possibility of exploiting, the fact that for a long while, most international criticism was heaped on Ethiopia for not accepting the EEBC ruling. Now, however, through Eritrea's own rash behavior, it and not Ethiopia was viewed as the trouble maker and spoiler. Not the best way to preserve one's political advantage, Caboche mused.

17. (C) Caboche said that some element of UNMEE should be preserved and kept in place, if only a liaison office or small observer mission. He said that if UNMEE were forced to depart and its mandate lapsed, it would be very difficult to reconstitute a successor mission once UNMEE's troops had returned to their home countries. He predicted that the international community would have difficulty reviving what could be viewed as a failed mission, particularly if one of the the host countries, in a Chapter VI context, refused to accept a successor mission.

18. (C) Another reason for preserving at least a part of UNMEE, Caboche said, was to avoid the unpleasant precedent of a country such as Eritrea taking unilateral steps to shut down and kick out a UN peacekeeping mission, even if the mission were "only" under Chapter VI as opposed to Chapter VII. It would be unfortunate if a renegade state such as Eritrea could do this with impunity, Caboche observed.

19. (C) Again acknowledging the lack of a concrete GOF suggestion on next steps, Caboche repeated the GOF's strong interest in this issue and its desire to continue discussion with the U.S. and other partners in order to find a satisfactory solution to the UNMEE/Eritrea dispute.

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